

poem "poop" was published before
then in the wormwood review.

poop, and other poems was,
by the way, a best-seller also,
by small press standards.
everyone poops, in other words,
has only outsold it by about
a million copies.

THE BUNNYFISH

it's what i called my daughter
when she was very young
and just learning to swim.
i would pick her up from lessons
at the outdoor pool,
and every morning she would emerge
with teeth chattering,
she was so slender, so sleek,
her hair wetted back,
and a frown creasing her brow.
i'd sweep her into a long, thick towel,
hug her up into my arms,
and hurry her to the car,
her cold cheek against my warm neck,
rush her home to a hot shower.

now she's a teenager
and these are not easy years
for her or for me.
she thinks i protect her too much,
that her friends have more freedom,
more fun, and maybe they do.
you always hear that you have to
let children learn from their mistakes,
but i don't think you have to let them
make mistakes before they are even
out of high school, out of the house,
that will curtail their lives before
they have even had a chance to live.
so in the necessary tug-of-war of
these years, the tension of her
struggle for independence
(i representing civilization;
she, the discontents of those whose
freedom is restricted) i try at least
to slow things down a little, to let
her have a chance to grow into the
capacity to make the decisions she will
have to make, and i try to assure that
she will have the base of education

that will afford her a life lived
as her own woman.

invariably, though, we are sometimes
hurtful to each other
in our sarcasms and silences.
and if i err in exaggerated fears,
or am sometimes tempted to flee into
the refuge of no longer caring,
from which i am always brought back
by the immensity of how i do care,
i can only hope that she will one day realize
how often she has been
all that i lived for,
how i gradually turned myself into
a different person,
so i would be a better father for her,
starting back when she was first
her old da's bunnyfish,
shivering in my arms which were still powerful:
i turned my life towards her then,
and now i am simply seeing it through to the end,
an ignorant man in an even more ignorant world,
making mistakes, but making them
out of love for her.

MERRY CHRISTMAS

i get a little sentimental about her
on christmas eve, partly because
we have been through so many of them
together, and partly because she does
work hard to make it the sort of time
that it's supposed to be for the kids.
i like the crabmeat sandwiches she always makes.
i like the opening of a few of the presents.
i like the sacred music.
i like the sense of family.

and this year, noting that, though
still attractive, she is showing the
first small signs of age, i almost take
her into my arms and make a half-apology
that her life with me has not been a better one,
that there has been so much bitterness
between us, so many stretches of mutual
recreminations,

even though i know she is
at least half-responsible
for whatever dolours
have accrued to her,